

NURTURING RP-US BILATERAL SECURITY RELATION

BY

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NURTURING RP-US BILATERAL SECURITY RELATION

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the condition and development of the United States-Republic of the Philippines (US-RP) bilateral relation. Viewed from a historical context, the US-RP bilateral relation has a strong foundation based on bedrocks of commonality especially on shared values for freedom and democracy. The United States and the Philippines' shared experiences and cooperative security engagements during the Second World War, Vietnam War, Korean War and the global war on terrorism have strengthened their relationship. The recent intercession of the Senate Committee of the Philippines on the continued implementation of the US-RP agreements however, has shaken the security relationship of the two countries. The Philippine Senate's move presents a challenge and an opportunity for the strengthening of the relationship of the two countries. The United States and the Philippines need to resolve issues on the agreements to strengthen the bilateral security relation that suits the environment of the 21st century and beyond.

NURTURING RP-US BILATERAL SECURITY RELATIONS

This paper examines the condition of the United States-Republic of the Philippines (US-RP) bilateral relation and how it will develop with the move of the Philippine Senate to terminate the Agreement with the United States. Although the initiative of the Philippine Senate may trigger diplomatic repercussions, it can be advanced that the bilateral relation between the two countries is bound to endure given common value systems, shared experiences and interests, and mutual respect. Such a relationship will be strengthened by cooperation and engagements of the two countries. To further cement the bilateral relation between the United States and the Philippines, it could however be argued that the existing treaty and agreements should be redefined to avert irritants and impediment to the smooth progression of the bilateral relation and to suit the environment of the 21st century and beyond.

The condition and development of the US-RP relationship can be viewed in five areas. First, the historical context of the development of the US-RP relation will be outlined. Second, the implication of the Call of the Philippine Senate Committee will be analyzed. Third, the commonality of the two countries' interests, concerns and values will be examined. Fourth, the relevance of the existing treaty and the agreement will be discussed. Lastly, the engagements and cooperation between the two countries will be listed.

Viewed from a historical context, we can see the development of the relationship between the United States and Philippines anchored on bedrock of commonality. The RP-US relation had been built upon a shared history of struggle for freedom and democracy. As we recall, the Filipinos easily embraced the Americans as they fought

hand in hand against the Spaniards who colonized the Philippines for over 300 years. The Filipinos again fought with the Americans against the Japanese during the Second World War. At that time, the Filipinos had once again showed their strong resolve to support the Americans as the vanguard of democracy and freedom. Since then, Filipinos became comfortable with Americans and with Westerners in general and value freedom and democracy. Filipinos are committed to democratic institutions including freedom of speech with their distrust and rejection of authoritarianism.¹ The Philippine commitment to democracy is manifested in the Declaration of Principles and State Policies under Article II of the Philippine Constitution which provides that the Philippines is a democratic state and that sovereignty resides in the people. The article further provides that the state values the dignity of every human person and guarantees full respect for human rights. Philippine adherence to democratic principles is also pronounced in section 4, Article III of its Constitution which provides that no law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, or expression of the press, or the right of the people to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.²

The development of a strong relationship between the United States and the Philippines can also be traced to the time when Filipinos assimilated the American culture. The assimilation began as an initiative of the US Army and the American teachers who came during the American occupation in the Philippines under the Taft Commission for literacy and education. The initiatives of the American teachers, also known by the Filipinos as the “Thomasites”, laid the foundation of the educational system of the Philippines and have greatly influenced the way of life of the Filipino

people. In fact, the Philippines is presently the largest English-speaking nation in the Asia.³

Having common values for freedom and democracy, the Philippines and United States further strengthened their relationship capitalizing on their shared experiences. Americans and Filipinos have been commemorating their experiences during the Second World War especially during the defense of Bataan and Corregidor, and the Leyte Landing of General Douglas McArthur to fulfill his famous promise-“I shall return”. Noteworthy is the fact that the Philippine Government has preserved the historic sites in Bataan and Corregidor where the Filipino and American soldiers stood their ground gallantry against the invading Japanese forces. The General Douglas McArthur Landing Memorial site remains a favorite attraction in Leyte, Philippines. The 50th anniversary of the reenactment of the landing of General Douglas McArthur in Leyte on October 20, 1944 was a grand scale production with hundred in the cast.⁴ Furthermore, the Filipinos have not forgotten their cherished memories fighting alongside the Americans during the Korean War. In that war, the Philippine Government sent five Battalion Combat Teams (BCTs) of the Philippine Army as the Philippine Expeditionary Force to Korea (PEFTOK) from 1950 to 1955 to contain the threat of the spread of communism. In almost five years, the Philippine government had sent 7,420 officers and men who displayed the sterling qualities of courage and steadfast dedication to defend democracy. During that war, 112 Filipinos offered their lives and 17 men remained missing.⁵ The memory of working alongside with the Americans in Vietnam is also everlasting in the minds of the Filipinos. In response to the American efforts to contain communism, the Philippines assisted the Republic of South Vietnam

for many years. As early as 1953 a group of Filipino doctors and nurses provided medical assistance to the hamlets and villages in Vietnam. In 1964, the Philippine Congress passed a law authorizing the President to send additional assistance which was implemented from 1964 to 1966 through the dispatch of five groups each composed of 34 physicians, surgeons, nurses, psychologists, and rural development workers from the armed forces. In addition, the Philippine Government sent 16 Philippine Army officers to Vietnam to assist the U.S. III Corps advisory effort in psychological warfare and civil affairs. In 1966, the Philippine Government signed a bill authorizing the dispatch of a 2,000-man civic action group consisting of an engineer construction battalion, medical and rural community development teams, a security battalion, a field artillery battery, a logistic support company, and a headquarters element. The Philippine Civic Action Group (PHILCAG) served in a relatively full capacity in 1966 with a total strength of 2,061, although well below that of South Korea's troop contribution of 45,566 and Australia's 4,525. The troop contribution of the Philippines significantly decreased in the later part 1969 during the US planned phased withdrawal.⁶ The Filipino Veterans have always stood as proud members of the PEFTOK and PHILCAG and as allied forces during the Second World War.

More than ever, the Philippine Government stands firm in its commitment to support the United States in its quest for freedom and democracy. In fact, the Philippines sent a 51-man contingent to Iraq in response to the call of President Bush for the formation of a "Coalition of the Willing". The Philippine contingent however were pulled-out shortly after a group of extremist terrorist threatened to behead a Filipino overseas contract worker in the Middle East.⁷ The Philippine government decided to

pull out the contingent at the time of an immense political pressure emanating from the group of overseas contract workers widely recognized as the backbone of Philippine economic recovery program.

Despite this temporary setback on bilateral security relations, the Philippines continue to stand alongside with the United States on its security initiatives. When the US government intensified its effort on war against terrorism, the Philippine government immediately acted to support the US initiatives. After the September 11 attacks, the Philippine military intensified its campaign against the Abu Sayaf Group (ASG), a local terrorist group originally known as Al Harakat-ul Al Islamiya. The ASG's link with foreign terrorist groups was evidently clear in 1995 when five ASG cells were directly implicated in a multipronged plot aimed at assassinating the pope and President Bill Clinton, bombing Washington's embassies in Manila and Bangkok, and sabotaging U.S. commercial airliners flying trans-Pacific routes from U.S West Coast cities. The plan hatched by Ramzi Yousef, the convicted mastermind of the 1993 attack of World Trade Center in New York, was foiled in Manila.

The Philippine relentless initiatives on counterterrorism resulted in the arrest and killing of ASG's top leaders who were also behind the sensational abduction of 20 hostages including two American missionaries and in a series of bombings, assassinations and kidnappings in the Philippines.⁸ Many of these counter-terrorism initiatives especially in neutralizing terrorist bases and safe havens were undertaken with U.S. support and assistance instituted under the auspices of the Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group-Philippines (JUSMAG-P). The United States has deployed more than 500 personnel to the Philippines as part of the Global War on Terrorism, including

experts from the U.S. Special Forces, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).⁹

The United States government has done its part to assist the Philippine Government in addressing its domestic problem. The United States and the Philippine government have recognized the need to address endemic peace and development concerns of the Philippines that contributed to the growth of insurgency and terrorism in the country. The United States has allocated a total of \$667 million in foreign assistance to the Philippines under the proposed government budget submitted by US President Barack Obama to the US Congress last May 7, 2009. The total budget proposed for the Philippines included the annually determined US development and security assistance, funds for the Filipino Veterans Equity Fund, and a tentative amount for the proposed Philippine compact agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation. In maritime security, the US assisted the development of the Philippine Navy's capability with the establishment of Coast Watch South (CWS) and in upgrading its surveillance, communications, and interdiction equipment. The Philippine Government appreciates the continued US assistances for defense and socio-economic development.¹⁰

The intercession of Philippine legislatures on the continued implementation of the US-RP agreements however, has once again shaken the bilateral security relationship between the two countries. In 2009, the Philippine Senate filed Senate Resolution No. 1356 expressing the sense of the Senate that the Department of Foreign Affairs should seek to renegotiate the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with the United States, and in

case of denial, should give notice of termination of the VFA.¹¹ Issues on legal jurisdiction and sovereignty were raised following a rape case in the Philippines involving an American soldier. This event prompted the move of the Philippine Senate. Lately, Senator Miriam Santiago renewed the call to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) as President Benigno Aquino III is considering the refinement of the controversial agreement. Santiago filed Joint Resolution No. 3 expressing the desire of Congress as a whole to terminate the VFA, and directing the secretary of foreign affairs to give the notice of termination to the United States. Senator Santiago maintained that the fatal flaw of the VFA is the failure to specify the period of stay of visiting forces, and the failure to define the activities the American personnel can engage in while deployed to the Philippines.¹² The initiative of the Philippine Senate to unduly terminate the existing agreement between the Philippines and United States can be termed as a harsh disregard of the long-standing relations between the two countries. The Senate's move to abrogate the agreement disregards the Philippine President's initiative to remedy the conflicting views on the agreement.

The move of the senator is within the authority of the Philippine Congress to intervene in the internal affairs of the country as section 21, article 7 of the Philippine constitution provides that no treaty or international agreement shall be valid and effective unless concurred in by at least two-thirds of all the members of the Senate.¹³ The acts of the Philippine Senate however can have diplomatic repercussions if met with an antagonistic response. The Senate actions manifested dissatisfaction with the American's political insensitivity rather than objection to the provision on legal jurisdiction contained in the agreement, as such agreement has a prior ratification of the

Philippine Senate. The call of the Philippine Senate for a renegotiation however is an opportunity which can be acted upon by both countries to review the agreement in order to be relevant and suitable for the current and future environment.

The review of the agreement should be done in the context of nurturing US-RP relationship. The relationship between New Zealand and United States can help illustrate how to remedy and resolve the issues surrounding the agreement between the Philippines and the United States. In 1951, Australia, the United States and New Zealand (ANZUS) entered into a treaty when there was concern of communist expansion. In 1986, New Zealand's membership of the treaty was suspended by the United States due to incompatible positions regarding nuclear weapons. New Zealand had declared itself nuclear free, and the United States would neither confirm nor deny if any of its ships visiting New Zealand were nuclear-powered or nuclear capable. At that time, the political relationship between the two countries was at an all-time low. However, the two countries have managed to work around their differences because of their common value system, shared interest and mutual respect. The two countries were able to foster a close defense relationship in the advent on global war on terror. However, ANZUS may not be put back since the treaty is no longer relevant in the 21st century and their opposing stand on nuclear issue is irreconcilable.¹⁴ The case of US-New Zealand provides an insight for the review of the agreement of United States and Republic of the Philippines. Setting aside all other factors presented, the US-NZ case particularly suggests the need to accommodate shared interests and consider the current and future environment to ensure the relevance of the agreement.

Understanding the shared national interest of both countries is an essential step for the review of the agreement. To understand the interest of the Philippines, it is necessary to look into the internal factors affecting the country. The Philippines is beset with many internal problems including, among others, the threat of insurgency, poverty, economic decline, terrorism, ecological degradation, corruption, drug trafficking, natural calamities and disasters. Most of these problems are interrelated and have caused the weakening of the country. The Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP) considers the threat of the communist terrorist groups, secessionist groups and Islamic extremist terrorists as the priority domestic concern. The threat of the communist and secessionist terrorist groups is seen as the most potent.¹⁵ These groups have exploited socio-economic-political issues to weaken the democratic institutions of the country. Insurgency in the Philippines has caused loss of human lives, economic opportunities, and resources. The insurgency even damaged the ideological, spiritual and moral foundation of the society with the propagation of communist and extremist ideology brought about by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the separatist-terrorist movements in the country.

The CPP under the leadership of its founding Chairman Jose Maria Sison, an ideologue of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought, together with its political arm, the National Democratic Front (NDF) and its military arm, New People's Army (NPA), have expanded nationwide reaching its peak strength in the mid 1980's, of about 25,000. The communist insurgent group declined in 1992 as a result of a split between the so called "reaffirmist group" who adhered to the Maoist doctrine especially on protracted rural-base guerilla warfare and the "rejectionist group" who advocated a reorientation towards

insurrectional line of urban-base operations.¹⁶ The internal struggle between the two communist factions led to the forging of peace agreement between the Government of the Philippines and the rejectionist group. In the year 2000, the CPP-NPA intensified its guerilla warfare following the second rectification campaign in the early 1990's with its new emphasis on widening and deepening mass or community bases. At present, the CPP-NPA, officially tagged as a communist terrorist movement, is estimated to include close to 9,000 combatants affecting nearly 2,500 villages around the country.¹⁷

Another serious Philippines security concern and in fact a terrorism concern in Maritime Asia lies in southern Philippines where Muslim Filipinos are a significant proportion of the population. Although only 5-8 percent of the Philippine's total population of more than 95 million, Filipino Muslim populace is concentrated in southern Philippines. As Christian immigration into Mindanao continues however, the Muslim population share has continued to decline. To establish a Muslim state in the southern Philippines, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) emerged in 1969. MNLF's military arm, the Bangsa Moro Army, commenced its armed uprising in 1972. After the Philippine government forged an agreement with the MNLF, the Moro Islamic liberation Front (MILF) emerged under the leadership of an Islamic scholar who split from the MNLF in 1978 and pursued a more militant and extremist Islamic struggle of the Muslim movement in the southern Philippines.¹⁸ Based on the AFP report in 2007, the MILF is estimated to have an armed strength of 11, 679 dispersed in 14 provinces in southern Philippines.¹⁹ In the 1990's the Abu Sayyaf group (ASG), a more extremist militant Islamic group known to have established links with international terrorist group through Al-Qaida, surfaced.²⁰ The MILF have worked with ASG and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a

foreign terrorist group based in Indonesia, to establish training and logistical bases in MILF main encampment. Furthermore, the MILF had been cooperating with the New People's Army of the Communist Party of the Philippines to deconflict common areas where the two forces are operating.²¹ Capitalizing on their logistical and financial support to the MILF, foreign terrorist groups infiltrated the Filipino Muslim communities in southern Philippines. Insurgents and all other terrorists groups thrived in remote rural areas stricken by poverty and lack of basic social services and infrastructures.

The Philippine government may consider the country's territorial integrity as vital national interest with the potent threat posed by the two terrorist, insurgent groups intending to secede and to establish a communist state in the country. The government had been, in fact, countering the threat posed by the communist and secessionist groups in order to safeguard the integrity of Philippine territory. Aside from counterinsurgency, the Philippine government's effort to claim islands within the South China Sea adds another concern for territorial integrity. The South China Sea sovereignty issue is a major flashpoint in the Asia-Pacific region centered on 170 geographical features of which 36 can be technically called islands known as Spratly Islands. China, Taiwan, Vietnam claim sovereignty over the entire group of islands, while Philippine, Malaysia, and Brunei claim parts of the group. The six countries claimed the geographical features in South China Sea to occupy an important strategic Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) linking the Pacific and Indian oceans, through which more than a quarter of the world's trade traverses. In addition, there are expectations that the seabed is rich in hydrocarbons and mineral deposits. In 1995 tensions were heightened when China occupied Mischief Reef- an islet claimed by the

Philippines and sits within the Philippines' Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ). Tension between the Philippines and China simmered however during the 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis as a result China's so-called Charm offensive to portray itself as a constructive and responsible regional actor.²²

The Philippines also considers sustainable socio-economic prosperity as its important interest. The initiative of the Philippine government for poverty alleviation and developing a capability to secure and defend the territory is highly dependent on the economy of the country. As such, the government is addressing concerns of the maritime security that would establish measures against piracy, smuggling, illicit trafficking and other similar transnational crime. Consequently, drug addiction has been one of the factors that have caused the degradation of morality of the people. Complicating the Philippines' interest on sustainable economic prosperity is a concern for ecological balance. The government needs a capacity to check illegal fishing especially with the use of dynamite and cyanide that have caused coastal degradation and would deprive future generations of the ability to enjoy the abundance of the resources of the country. Furthermore, frequent natural calamities have also added to government's concern for socio-economic prosperity. All of these issues are inter-related and have caused the socio-political-economic instability of the country. Philippine interests can affect the interest of the United States.

The United States interest in the Philippines goes beyond protection of an ally that has embraced democratic ideals and values which American forefathers saw as imperatives for free and open society. With common democratic ideals and values, the United States and the Philippines can effectively forge consensus to advance their

common interest and to tackle shared challenges. As United States' interest goes beyond the Philippines and extends to the entire Asia Pacific region, its interest can be seen over the past century as preventing the domination of any rival power in the region. Such domination would make it more difficult for the United States to pursue its political and economic objectives in the region. To counter any possibility of domination by a rival power, the United States has continuously sought to develop a countervailing balance in the region.²³

The importance of the Philippines in contributing to the realization of the United States interest is apparent. Geographically, the Philippines lies in a strategic location that forms part of the defensive belt composed of maritime countries within the western Pacific Rim that could secure maritime routes in South China Sea. The Philippine proximity to the Taiwan Strait makes it potentially highly valuable for conducting military operations in the event of an armed confrontation between the United States and China over Taiwan. Air bases in Northern Philippines are closer as compared to the airbase in Okinawa, Japan.²⁴ On economic aspect, the Philippines provides an open economic system potential for investments with cheap and efficient labor force, huge market, and available natural resources. American corporations have been the largest foreign investors in the Philippines with 80 percent of foreign investment in 900 of the 1,000 largest firms in 1970. In the late 1980s, the United States remained the largest foreign investor, but its dominant position has eroded. According to Central Bank statistics, United States investment between 1970 and 1988 totaled US\$1.6 billion, more than one-half the total of foreign-owned equity in the country. The Central Bank reports for 1989 showed the United States as having the largest investment of US\$68.8 million.

Although the Philippine constitution forbids foreign investors from owning or leasing public agricultural lands, several transnational agribusiness firms have been operating in the Philippines. Among them are Del Monte Corporation and Castle and Cooke which have established pineapple plantations in Mindanao. The combined plantations of Del Monte and the Castle and Cooke subsidiary, Dole Philippines, have a total land area of about 21,400 hectares in 1987.²⁵ With significant investments in the Philippines, the United States concern will include not only the security of its economic investments but also the security of its citizens staying in the country.

The United States and the Philippines common interests are apparent. On combating terrorism, the United States government assumes the global leadership in the wake of 9/11 incident as the Philippine government works in tandem to address the threat posed by domestic Islamic separatist-terrorist groups who have established linkages with foreign terrorist network. Having financial and logistical support of foreign terrorist, the local terrorist movements have exploited the issue of injustice, Muslim repression, poverty, marginalization, and social exclusion as central themes for recruitment and radicalization.²⁶ As such, the success of the campaign on combating terrorism in the Philippines entails a broad, sustained, and integrated campaign including partnership with and concerted efforts of allies, partners and multinational institutions. The campaign requires close coordination and collaboration especially sharing of information to identify, track, limit access for funding and deny establishment of bases or safe haven. To effectively ensure common security, collaborative efforts must be geared not only in neutralizing the threat of the armed component of the terrorist groups but also towards addressing the underlying socio-political-economic

causes that foster the growth of Islamic extremist movement. On the establishment of countervailing balance to check the possibility of China's domination in the region, the United States alliance with the Philippines together with other allied countries can form the base of security in the Asia-Pacific region. These treaty-allied countries will not only check any potential Chinese aggression but can also work together with United States leadership to develop a collaborative agenda such as combating terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, international piracy, cyber attacks, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, illicit trafficking and other regional security concerns. Common interests and concerns of the United States and the Philippines can forge consensus and therefore could be the basis for the examination of the treaty and agreement of the two countries.

The Mutual Defense Treaty entered into by the Republic of the Philippines and the United States of America in August of 1951 provides a declaration that the two countries defend themselves against external armed attack. The two countries however shall settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means and refrain from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations. The two countries separately and jointly by self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack. The two countries, through their foreign ministers or their deputies, will consult together from time to time regarding the implementation of the Mutual Defense Treaty and whenever in the opinion of either of them the territorial integrity, political independence or security of either of the two countries is threatened by external armed attack in the Pacific. Both countries would act to meet the common dangers in

accordance with its constitutional processes. Any armed attack against territory, armed forces, public vessels or aircraft in the Pacific and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. The Treaty does not affect in any way the rights and obligations of the two countries under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of the international peace and security.²⁷ Although the provisions contained in US-RP Mutual Defense Treaty (US-RP MDT) may not necessarily apply for Philippine claims in the South China Sea, the Philippines is banking on its defense relationship with the United States to serve as indirect deterrence against China. In fact the Mischief Reef incident in 1995 has revived the spirit of the US-RP MDT for the Philippine government leading to its decision to rebuild defense relationship with the United States after the withdrawal of the latter's military from the Philippines in 1992. The Philippine government hopes that the restoration of defense ties would provide for the needed assistance to rebuild Philippine military's capability to defend itself. One of the highlight of the rapprochement between the United States and the Philippines is the US-RP Visiting Forces Agreement.²⁸

The United States and the Philippines entered into an agreement termed as "Visiting Force Agreement" recognizing that their obligations under the Mutual Defense Treaty requires United States armed forces personnel visit in the Philippines from time to time. Both countries saw a need to come up with agreed provisions that define the treatment of United States personnel visiting the Philippines. They have agreed among other things, that it is the duty of United States personnel to respect the laws of the

Republic of the Philippines and to abstain from any activity inconsistent with the spirit of this agreement, and, in particular, from any political activity in the Philippines.²⁹

The spirit of the treaty and the agreement clearly considers the purpose and spirit of the charter of the United Nation. The treaty and agreement also display the mutual respect for each other's law and sovereignty. The treaty and agreement however are mainly concerned with defense against armed attack and does not address current security concerns, particularly terrorism and other transnational crimes. The current security concerns including other irregular, unconventional and non-state threats have departed from the arena of conventional war fighting. Current defense and security cooperation will therefore be more diverse than in the past as the environment requires variety of measures to address both conventional and unconventional threats.

In the advent of the September 11, 2001 incident, RP-US defense cooperation shifted to counter terrorism. The Philippine government saw the global war on terrorism as an opportunity to address the threat of domestic terrorist groups with help from the United States. Manila allowed US over-flights of Philippine airspace and use of airfields as transit points in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. The United States in turn, provide antiterrorism training and advice and deployed military personnel to train the Philippine Army in counterterrorism operations in Mindanao. The United States increased its security assistance to the Philippines from \$2 million in foreign military financing in fiscal year 2002 to a sustained level of \$19 million or more in subsequent years, in addition to transfers of significant amounts in excess defense articles.³⁰ All of these engagements work towards common interests however, they remain uncovered by the existing treaty and agreement. Consequently, both

governments would rely on the visiting force agreement to accommodate current complex engagements.

The economic situation poses another major challenge on how the United States and the Philippines pursue the treaty and agreement. At times, the Philippine government can be seen as seemingly shying away from the spirit of the treaty and agreement especially on maintaining and developing its own defense capacity to be interoperable with United States armed forces. Much as the Philippine government would want to come to the forefront to be actively involved with the initiatives of the United States, the former has to prioritize revitalizing its economy. The Philippine Government has first to put its economy in better shape before it can be a reliable partner of the United States. Meantime that the Philippines cannot be made reliable militarily, it can be a reliable partner in discharging so called “soft power”. The US relationship with France serves as an illustration of this kind of partnership. France’s international support in diplomacy and its contribution in peacekeeping efforts for regional stability count much.³¹ The Philippines can play as a partner to help advance important US strategic interests in East Asia, being a founding member of ASEAN, a democratic state, and a front-line state involved in key East Asian disputes. Developing the Philippines as a strategic partner will also help strengthen the nation’s self confidence and ability to resist external predation and help it conclude a negotiated settlement of the Moro insurgency. As long as the United States remains so central to Philippine foreign and defense policy, Philippine natural inclination to assist the United States in maintaining Asia-Pacific stability remain strong.³²

Despite the many challenges, Philippine Ambassador Gaa has an optimistic view on Philippine-United States relations underscoring the common history and shared democratic values of the Philippines and the United States. Gaa reaffirmed the continuing better relations between the Philippines and the United States and expressed confidence that Philippine-American partnership would grow stronger even at a time of great challenge for America and for all nations. He finds that the Philippines stands as one with America and its leadership at this crucial moment and will not falter as both countries pursue their mutual goals and remain firmly committed to common values and ideals of freedom and democracy”.³³

Conclusion and Recommendations

The United States-Republic of the Philippines (US-RP) bilateral relation has a strong foundation based on bedrocks of commonality especially on shared values for democracy and freedom. The relationship has been strengthened by shared experiences and relatively steady cooperative security engagements of the two countries since the Second World War, Vietnam and Korean war and until the global war on terrorism. Support of the United States to the Philippines for development and security has been substantial. The United States and the Philippines share interests on maintaining the peace and in the stability in the region especially on preventing aggression or domination of another emerging state and addressing terrorism and other transnational crime. The bilateral relationship of the United States and the Philippines is bound to endure having common value system, shared experiences and mutual respect intact despite the move of the Philippine Senate to terminate the Agreement with the United States. The Philippine Senate move however can be an irritant to the smooth progression of the bilateral relationship if met with antagonistic response. The existing

treaty and agreement are designed to address conventional threats and do not provide provisions to address current common concerns of the two countries including irregular, unconventional and non-state threats.

The Philippine Senate action provides an opportunity that can be acted upon by for both countries to further strengthen the bilateral relationship. Considering the shared interests, cooperative security engagements and mutual support, the United States and the Republic of the Philippines may conduct a comprehensive review of the existing agreement. The two countries need to redefine the agreement to accommodate common interest to avert irritants and impediment to the bilateral relations and to suit current and future environment. While the treaty serves as a focal point for shared interest on mutual defense, regional peace and stability and promotion of democracy, the agreement should cover emerging concerns on terrorism, piracy and illegal trafficking and other transnational crimes. Additionally, the agreement should include provisions for engagements on Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. The agreement therefore, must provide for provisions that would cater not only for the status of the American personnel visiting the Philippines but activities pertinent to current and emerging concerns.

Endnotes

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